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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2018

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SUBJECT: TRANSCOM GEN MCNABB MEETS AZERBAIJANI DEFENSE  
MINISTER

REF: BAKU 1117

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, reasons 1.4 b and d.

Summary

¶1. (C) On November 18 Commander USTRANSCOM General Duncan McNabb, met Azerbaijani DefMin General Colonel Safar Abiyev to discuss GOAJ support for overland transport of supplies to U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan. Abiyev responded favorably to the concept, but steered the discussion on all other questions - as he often does with U.S. visitors - to Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied territories and his dissatisfaction with what he sees as unjustified U.S. support for Armenia in light of Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territory. Abiyev also reiterated the GOAJ's desire to integrate with NATO. Discussing Caspian maritime security, he made it clear that issues at sea take a definite back seat to the occupied territories. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On November 17-18 Commander USTRANSCOM GEN Duncan McNabb, USAF, accompanied by Ambassador Derse, met with Defense Minister General Colonel Safar Abiyev. RADM Harnitcheck, TRANSCOM J5/4, BG Lennon, CENTCOM Deputy J4, Ms. Kathy Casares, TRANSCOM POLAD, and Mr. John Hall, DLA Executive Director for Operations and Sustainment also joined.

Northern Distribution Network

¶3. (C) General McNabb explained to Abiyev that his primary purpose was to discuss Azerbaijan's potential as a link in a Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to Afghanistan. The USG is seeking to maximize the number of available routes for sustainment items, i.e. food and construction materials, while delivering most lethal items by air. In this connection the General praised Azerbaijan's constant cooperation on overflight and refueling for U.S. air assets. Abiyev, who was familiar with the route the NDN might take, said firmly that his Ministry had "no objection" to the plan.

Armenia/Caucasus

¶4. (C) Minister Abiyev told General McNabb that Russia's

invasion of Georgia shows that it clearly desires to control outcomes in the South Caucasus, and that it considers the South Caucasus to be under its control. Azerbaijan, however, protected its independence and always will, even while twenty percent of its territory is under occupation. He said he was concerned at the attitudes of the "great nations;" Russia is completely in support of Armenia, which also gets significant U.S. support. He doesn't see the same pressures being placed on Armenia as on Azerbaijan, and as long as that continues, the situation in the South Caucasus will remain dangerous. Armenia will never go against Russia, and without the latter's support would barely stand as a country on its own. Armenia is a country whose name only exists on paper - "It doesn't have any capabilities . . . factories, plants, the whole economy belongs to Russia . . . when you go to the country your passport will be checked by Russia before it is checked by Armenia." Stating flatly that the diplomatic process is not leading to results, the Minister was direct: "We hide from no one the fact that we are preparing to liberate the territories." General McNabb told Abiyev that the Minsk Group process is Azerbaijan's best option, and that the United States applauds the Moscow meeting of Presidents on November 2. Abiyev flatly replied that the Minsk Group was supposed to yield results since 1992, but had not.

NATO

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¶5. (C) Asked by General McNabb for his appraisal of the pace and results of Azerbaijan's integration with NATO, Abiyev groused that Azerbaijan was pursuing a more disciplined approach in its adoption of NATO standards than either

Georgia and Ukraine, whose campaigns for accession he regarded causing "internal destruction" of the armed forces and therefore they are making slower progress. Azerbaijan's forces are better than either of those countries' forces, he said, noting with regret the Georgian army's performance in combat, and dismissing Ukrainian forces as slow to adopt NATO practices in reality. Azerbaijan wants ever deeper cooperation with NATO, he said, and his reasoning showed that Azerbaijan's neighborhood makes this necessary. Russia, the Minister said, "created Karabakh," so integration in that direction is categorically impossible. "You know our relations with Iran," he continued. Discussion of NATO also turned inevitably to Armenia, as Abiyev continued "when Russia and Iran help Armenia, this is against Azerbaijan. We understand this. When we see the United States helping Armenia, you are cooperating with our enemies and this is very negative to us."

Caspian Maritime Security

¶6. (C) When Gen McNabb asked how the MINDEF saw Caspian Sea maritime security, Abiyev first responded that they could solve maritime security but they see the occupied territories as the most dangerous problem ahead, as there was a large amount of Russian Equipment under Russian control there and "they can do whatever they want," so the situation on the ground was paramount. The Ambassador pressed the maritime security issue, telling Abiyev that the United States has resources it would like to dedicate to Caspian security, but needs to have clarity on the GOAJ's concept of how the Navy, Coast Guard and newly formed naval infantry are intended to work together. Clarifying this situation is particularly important in view of the ambiguous situation concerning the Navy headquarters (reftel.) The Minister answered that the Navy was going to get a new headquarters, but also used this as an opportunity to criticize U.S. engagement with Armenia, saying that if the United States believes in balanced relations, it should take half of the \$100 million (sic) he alleged is going to Armenia in military assistance and give it to him to build a new naval base. Driving the point home, Abiyev said this strategic partnership should be practical, and not just verbal.

Comment

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**¶7. (C) COMMENT:** On substance, this meeting was positive, and we expect full cooperation from Azerbaijan defense authorities going forward with NDN. Abiyev's commentary on Russia and Armenia is typical for him, and we heard nothing we've not heard before. Both Ambassador Derse and General McNabb replied to his criticism of the United States' relations with Armenia by pointing to our heightened engagement with Azerbaijan in recent months, particularly the Vice President's visit, and emphasizing that the Administration has always requested greater support for Azerbaijan than Congress is willing to provide. Abiyev's claims about GOAJ forces' full adoption of NATO standards are excessive, but his and the GOAJ's preference for increased NATO engagement is genuine. Less encouragingly, the Minister seemed less than fully engaged on the issues surrounding the naval HQ and on maritime security in general.

**¶8. (U)** General McNabb did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

DERSE